

STEPS IN THE DESIGN PROCESS FOR US 93

Setting

US 93 traverses the Flathead Indian Reservation, which is located on the west side of the Rocky Mountains in western Montana. Picturesque mountains and mountain valleys, with the broad Flathead Valley to the North and the majestic Mission Mountains to the East, characterize this part of Montana. The area is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including Grizzly Bear, White-tailed Deer, Mule Deer, Pronghorn, Elk, Painted Turtles, Bighorn Sheep, and a number of fish and bird species. It is also home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation (CSKT).

Initial Goals

In order to be respectful of the land, the people, and the wildlife, initial goals were established:

- Develop an understanding of the land and the relationship the Salish and Kootenai people have with the land.
- Find ways the land can shape or influence the road
- Develop concepts that respect the integrity and character of the place, people, and wildlife
- Restore habitat areas that have been fragmented by the road and surrounding development
- Respect and restore the way of life in small communities along the road
- Create a better visitor understanding of the place that the Salish and Kootenai people call their homeland.

One of the first steps was a review of reports, studies, surveys, photographs, and other documents related to the highway corridor and the natural resources. In addition, an initial reconnaissance of the highway corridor was conducted to identify scenic, aesthetic, and cultural resources. This review and reconnaissance helped build a strong base of knowledge that served as the foundation for subsequent design discussions and decisions.

Spirit of Place

Before any design concepts for the road were conceived, it was essential to get a better understanding of the land, what makes it unique, and how the Salish and Kootenai people relate to the land. The design of the reconstructed highway is premised on the idea that the road is a visitor and that it should respond to and be respectful of the land and the Spirit of Place. Understanding the Spirit of Place — the whole continuum of what is seen, touched, felt, and traveled through — provides inspiration and guidance, and leads to design solutions uniquely suited to the special qualities of the place.

The Spirit of Place includes more than just the road and adjacent areas – it consists of the surrounding mountains, plains, hills, forest, valley, and sky, and the paths of waters, glaciers, winds, plants, animals, and native peoples. (Spirit of Place - Photomontage, p. 5) The Spirit of Place encompasses the entire Mission Valley, Mission and Salish Mountains, Jocko Valley, and Rattlesnake Divide. This broader environmental continuum has distinct landscapes like large outdoor rooms, which the existing road bisects. (Spirit of Place – Landscape Continuum, p. 6)